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Views of senior nursing students on the concept of old age: a metaphor study

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ABSTRACT

Metaphors are part of everyday language as they help us to communicate effectively and allow us to reveal meaning to concepts. Older adults have been described using metaphors like ‘Tsunami’ in western countries. However, it is unknown which metaphors are used to describe older adults in Turkey. The aim of this study was to reveal the perceptions of the concept of aging among fourth year nursing students through metaphors. This study employed phenomenology, which is a qualitative research design. All fourth-year nursing students in the Nursing Department of the Faculty of Health Sciences of a Turkish university constituted the study population. The study was completed with the participation of 60 students. The data were collected in May–June 2022. To reveal the metaphors that each nursing student considered representative for the concept of ‘aging,’ they were asked to complete the following sentence: ‘Aging is like ... because ...’. In qualitative research, metaphors can help simplify complex and/or multidimensional concepts through connecting one familiar concept to another familiar one, resulting in the comparison between the two concepts opening up new possibilities and perspectives. Metaphors provide structure to data and aid understanding of a familiar process in a new light. The metaphors and their justifications, written by students in their own handwriting, were used as the main data source in this study. Students completed the questionnaire in one session. The completion of the form took approximately 20 minutes. The mean age of the students was 22.5 ± 1.4 years, and 78.3% of them were female. In analyzing the data, a content analysis approach comprising coding, the identification of themes, and grouping of data according to codes and themes was used. The metaphors produced by the students were categorized as ‘positive’ and ‘negative.’ In the positive category, there were 10 metaphors formed by 43 (71.7%) nursing students. Fourteen metaphors by 17 (28.3%) nursing students were identified in the negative category. The most commonly used metaphors were found to be ‘tree,’ ‘flower,’ ‘kid,’ and ‘book.’ It was observed that the students perceived the concept of old age as a process that helped individuals gain knowledge and experience and a guiding process. In order to increase and maintain a positive attitude toward the older people, it can be recommended to include more topics and practices related to old age.

Introduction

One of the issues of global importance is the aging of societies (Ghimire et al., 2019). According to the World Health Organization 2019 data, there are 703 million older people in the world. It is estimated

that this number will double in 2050 and reach 1.5 billion (United Nations, 2020). In our country, the population aged 65 and over, which is considered as the older people population, was 6,651,503 in 2016, and it increased by 24% in five years to 8,245,124 in 2021 (Turkish Statistical Institute [TUIK], 2022).

In the aging process, some changes occur in the organism with biological aging, and the possibility of acute and chronic diseases increases with these changes (Ferreira et al., 2022). Despite increasing diseases, old age is not a disease; increasing health problems and decreasing functional abilities are emerging as some of the potential life-changing problems of aging (Türgay et al., 2015). For this reason, the increase in the number and percentage of individuals over the age of 65 require the reorganization of health systems, the country's economy, and social relations (Podhorecka et al., 2022). Although almost every science dealing with aging agrees that aging is associated with a series of negative biological changes, the perception of aging has varied over the ages. While old age is sometimes perceived as a time of painful physical changes, social exclusion, and severe loneliness, sometimes it is seen as an opportunity to realize plans (Gajak-Toczek, 2020). It is known that the experiences of the older people and their families have a significant effect on society's perception of aging, and this effect causes changes in behavior and attitudes toward the older people. Society's attitude toward aging is influenced by certain characteristics, such as the individual's age, past experiences, cultural beliefs, values, and educational background (Duru Aşiret et al., 2017).

Physiological, psychological, cognitive, emotional, and social changes that occur with age make the care of the older people more important for health professionals (Özdemir & Bilgili, 2016). While nurses have a key role in the care provided to the older people among health professionals, they have a direct impact on increasing the quality of care (Abreu & Caldevilla, 2015). Nurses' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors toward aging reveal this effect (Özdemir & Bilgili, 2016). Therefore, it is considered that if nurses and nursing students who will be professional members of the future have a positive view of aging, it will increase the quality of the service provided. An examination of the literature reveals that many studies have been conducted on the perception, attitudes, and behaviors of nursing students regarding aging (Abreu & Caldevilla, 2015; Özdemir & Bilgili, 2016; Sarabia-Cobo & Castanedo Pfeiffer, 2015; Türgay et al., 2015). As a matter of fact, in a study conducted with nursing students in Spain, it was determined that negative stereotypes about aging among students were considerably high (Sarabia-Cobo & Castanedo Pfeiffer, 2015). Similarly, in a study conducted with nursing students in Portugal, it was concluded that students' attitudes toward aging were negative (Abreu & Caldevilla, 2015). In another study conducted in Turkey, it was stated that students' positive attitudes toward the older people were moderate (Türgay et al., 2015). As can be understood from these results, it is possible to say that the feelings, thoughts, and attitudes toward the older people and old age are affected by many factors, such as cultural and personal characteristics and experiences. Along with these factors, it is very important to determine how the concept of old age is perceived by nursing students as future professionals in terms of increasing the quality of care.

In recent years, metaphors have been used to reveal perceptions, attitudes, and opinions on many subjects. Metaphors make it easier for a phenomenon or concept to be expressed in more familiar terms in making sense of it or explaining it (Arslan & Bayrakçı, 2006; Demir & Yıldırım, 2019). Metaphors are among the most powerful cognitive tools that structure, direct, and control our thoughts about the development and functioning of events. In other words, metaphors are cognitive models that help people understand a phenomenon through another phenomenon. It is seen that metaphorical analyzes of old age are made with a wide variety of concepts. For example, 'tsunami' appears as a frequently used metaphor when describing the aging population (Barusch, 2013). In a study by Holyk (2021) in which old age metaphors were examined, structural, ontological, and orientational metaphors were explored, and it was determined that structural metaphors included the concepts of 'journey,' 'war,' 'death,' 'physical/mental condition,' 'lost,' ontological metaphors included the concepts of 'container,' 'material object,' 'building/structure,' and the word 'down' stood out as an orientational metaphor. Sevil et al. (2019) found that while the metaphors of 'autumn,' 'child,' 'winter,'

and 'dry tree' stood out the most for old age, 'child' and 'baby' were used for the older people and old age, and 'deserted' represented loneliness. It was concluded that the metaphors of 'island' and 'darkness' were prominent.

In our country, which has had a young population for many years, it is predicted that the increase in the older population in recent years will continue. Therefore, active and healthy aging process is among the priority issues. In order to make active aging possible and to remove the obstacles to active aging, it is necessary to know the perception of old age, which can change from generation to generation and from society to society. In addition, nurses, who are the most numerous professional group among health professionals in our country, are required to know all aspects of the aging process and have a positive attitude, as they are involved in all processes such as protecting, improving, treating and rehabilitating the health of the older people. Positive attitudes toward older people will increase the quality of services provided to them. In this context, it is very important to first determine the perception of old age of the students who will be professional nurses of the future. Therefore, the use of metaphors in the interpretation and explanation of the concepts of aging and old age will provide convenience in terms of determining the existing situation more clearly. Thus, in this study, the concept of old age was examined in line with the metaphorical perceptions of nursing students as future care givers.

Materials and methods

Design

This study employed descriptive phenomenology, which is a qualitative research design to elicit how a group of nursing students conceptualized aging. The phenomenological approach provides a perspective on emotions, thoughts and behaviors. While it does not offer causal explanations or theories, phenomenology provides an account of the experience of 'being in the world' for a person. In simple terms, phenomenology can be defined as an approach to research that seeks to describe the essence of a phenomenon by exploring it from the perspective of those who have experienced it (Neubauer et al., 2019). From the perspective of nursing, phenomenology is attractive because it can help to improve care and understanding of issues critical to nurses and their clients, whether as individuals, families or larger communities (Matua, 2015). Further still, Streubert and Carpenter (2011) added that phenomenology offers researchers the opportunity to describe and clarify phenomena that better inform nursing education, research and practice, thereby enhancing evidence-based practices. In this research, qualitative data was obtained through metaphors. Within the framework of this general objective, answers were sought for the following questions:

- What are the metaphors that final year nursing students use for the concept of aging?
- In what conceptual categories can these metaphors be grouped?

Sample

All fourth-year nursing students ($n = 70$) in the Nursing Department of the Faculty of Health Sciences of a Turkish university constituted the study population. At the university where the sample was selected, the curriculum of senior nursing students includes 'Clinical Practice I' and 'Clinical Practice II' courses. The intern program at this school aims to reinforce the knowledge, skills and attitudes gained during the four-year nursing education in a real-life environment in order for the student to provide professional and safe care services. Throughout the internship program, students practice in clinical areas such as internal medicine, surgery, gynecology and mental health. In addition, the perceptions of senior nursing students in pre-graduation positions regarding elderly people who need care in professional life are also important. Criterion sampling method, one of the purposive sampling methods, was used in the selection of the study group. As a criterion in the research; 'being

a nursing student' and 'being in the fourth-year' were determined. In qualitative research, there is no set rule for sample size, which therefore depends on diversity and the amount of data (Erdoğan, 2014; Nyumba et al., 2018; Tekindal & Uğuz Arsu, 2020). The sample initially consisted of 66 students who agreed to participate in the study. However, the data obtained from six participants were not included in the study due to incomplete information and logical errors in the reasons expressed for the developed metaphors. Finally, the study was completed with the participation of 60 students. A list was obtained by defining the metaphors produced by the students as concepts. Accordingly, attention was paid to whether the metaphors were clearly expressed or not. Participants met the following criteria: they were fourth-year nursing students, and they had volunteered to participate in this study. Students who did not indicate any metaphors and did not answer all questions were excluded from the study.

Examination, which is organized by the Turkish Higher Education Council. In Turkey, studying nursing takes four years. The baccalaureate science degree programs in nursing include 9 basic nursing courses: Fundamentals of Nursing, Medical Nursing, Surgical Nursing, Women's Health and Obstetrics Nursing, Children's Health and Diseases Nursing, Mental Health Nursing, Community Health Nursing, Nursing Management, and Education in Nursing. According to the European Union (EU) requirement for the number of hours of nursing education, 2,300 clinical and 2,300 theoretical hours are completed during the length of nursing education to educate nurses as generalists rather than specialists. The professional nursing education program is designed to educate students in creative problem solving, critical thinking, and decision making environments. Nursing education in Turkey, today, compares favorably to international educational standards for nursing (Can, 2010).

Data collection

Students have not been taught metaphors to describe old age as part of any course before. Before the data collection phase of the study, information was provided and an example of a metaphor on another subject was given. Data collection in the study was done by a researcher. Later, the collected forms were examined and categorized by two other researchers. The data were collected in May-June 2022 using a two-part form. The first section of the form included demographic questions, such as age and gender, while the second section of the form included the sentence 'Aging is like . . . because . . .' for participants to complete in order to identify the metaphors they developed related to the concept of aging. The participants were asked to liken aging to something else (an entity, a living thing, an object, etc.) and briefly state the reason for that analogy. This structured open-ended questionnaire was based on the literature (Chivers, 2021; Earlier, 2010; Holyk, 2021; Sevil et al., 2019). The metaphors and their justifications, written by students in their own handwriting, were used as the main data source in this study. Students completed the questionnaire in one session. Data were collected during the lesson. The completion of the form took approximately 20 minutes. Students did not receive any grades for filling out the forms. Students who did not want to participate in the research were excluded from the study.

Data analysis

Two different methods were used to analyze the data. The analysis of demographic data was carried out using IBM SPSS Statistics v26.0. The qualitative data obtained in the study was assessed by making use of content analysis. The analysis and interpretation of the metaphors developed by the students were realized in five stages (Saban, 2009):

Coding and sorting phase

At this stage, a temporary list of metaphors produced by the students was made and it was checked whether they clearly expressed a certain metaphor in their writings. Papers that did not include any metaphor or reason or were not clearly expressed were excluded from the research. The data were encoded as numbers. Metaphor codes were given by the researchers according to the questionnaire

order. Six forms were excluded as they included metaphors without explanations and/or expressions that were not meaningful.

Metaphor compilation phase

The metaphors produced by participants were analyzed with codes, and the produced metaphors were addressed by establishing relationships between similar ones.

Category creation phase

The relationships between the metaphors related to the concept of 'aging' and their reasons were analyzed and categories were formed by bringing together the relevant ones. The metaphors produced for aging were categorized according to their justifications in the 'because . . .' phrases. The metaphors created by the students about the concept of 'aging' were divided into 2 categories in total by considering their content. These categories are 'positive' and 'negative.' When the reasons for a few metaphors in the positive category such as 'Tree' and 'Book' metaphors were examined, it was emphasized that old age brings wisdom and experience. When the reasons for the 'Baby' and 'Old car' metaphors in the negative category were examined, it was emphasized that old age is a process that needs care.

Validity and reliability phase

Validity and reliability are important concerns regarding the stages of establishing the conceptual framework of any research regardless of its type and collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the data as well as presenting the findings (Merriam, 2013). According to Yıldırım and Şimşek (2006), a detailed explanation of the process from data collection to results is important to ensure validity in qualitative studies. In the present study, the data analysis process has been explained in detail to ensure validity. All three of the researchers worked in harmony from the beginning to ensure the reliability of the study, and they reached consensus when conflicts occurred. Afterward, the other authors reviewed the analyzes such as whether the codes were consistent with each other and belonged to each category. Then, the metaphors were categorized and finalized. In addition, after the categories were identified, to ensure reliability, an expert working in the nursing department was given a piece of paper on which the metaphors and reasons were written out together with the names of the conceptual categories. For this purpose, academicians with qualitative study experience and working in the field of nursing were selected. The expert was asked to match them. After all metaphors were matched with a category, the results were compared with the researcher's matches. For this comparison, the formula of 'Reliability = Consensus/Consensus + Disagreement' (Miles & Huberman, 1994) was applied, and the reliability was accordingly calculated as $22/22 + 2 = 0.91$, which indicates that the study is reliable.

Transferring the obtained data to a computer

The metaphors were categorized according to their justifications, and the frequency (f) of the number of participants in each category was calculated. After categorizing the metaphors according to their justifications, they were coded as reported by the researchers. The letters M (male) and F (female) were used for the gender of the students while attributing quotes to participants. The ages of the students are specified as A21 and A22.

The metaphors that emerged as a result of the analysis were categorized by taking their common features and analogical aspects into consideration. Frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were calculated using IBM SPSS Statistics v26.0 in the analysis of the students' demographic data.

Ethical considerations

Gazi University Ethics Committee approved the study's procedure. In addition, institutional permission was obtained from Bilecik University for the implementation of the research. All the participants

Table 1. Participant sociodemographic characteristics ($N = 60$).

Variables	Mean \pm SD ^a	Min – Max ^b
Age	22.5 \pm 1.4	21–28
	<i>N</i>	%
<i>Gender</i>		
Female	47	78.3
Male	13	21.7
<i>Last graduated high school</i>		
Anatolian high school	35	58.3
Health professional high school	22	36.7
Other ^c	3	5.0
<i>Longest lived place</i>		
Village	10	16.7
Town	12	20.0
City	38	63.3
<i>Perceived Health Status</i>		
Bad	2	3.3
Neither good nor bad	13	21.7
Good	45	75.0
<i>Having received any training in aging (n=59)</i>		
Yes	44	74.6
No	15	25.4
<i>The means through which knowledge regarding aging was acquired (n=44)</i>		
During undergraduate education	40	91
Scientific meetings including conferences, symposiums	2	4.5
Media outlets such as radio, television, newspaper	2	4.5
<i>Caring for elderly patients in clinical practice</i>		
Yes	60	100.0
No	–	–

^aSD: Standard deviation.

^bMin – Max: Minimum – Maximum.

^cOther: Science high school, industrial vocational high school, regular high school.

were informed of the purpose of the study and were assured that their data would be kept confidential; they thus signed an informed consent form before participating.

Result

In this section, information on the demographics of the students and the metaphors they developed for the concept of aging are provided. The mean age of the students was 22.5 ± 1.4 (range: 21–28) years, and 78.3% of them were female. Of the students, 58.3% were Anatolian high school graduates, 63.3% lived in the city for the longest time, and 75% of them had a good health perception. The majority of the students (74.6%) stated that they had knowledge about aging, and 91% of them said that the source of this information is undergraduate education. All students stated that they gave care to older patients during clinical applications (Table 1).

When Table 2 is examined, it is seen that 60 nursing students produced 24 different metaphors in the form of ‘Aging is like . . . , because’ Students compared aging mostly to a tree ($n: 21, 35\%$), a flower ($n: 6, 10\%$), a kid ($n: 5, 8.3\%$), and a book ($n: 5, 8.3\%$).

The metaphors produced by the students were categorized as ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ (Figure 1). In the positive category, there were 10 metaphors formed by 43 (71.7%) nursing students. Fourteen metaphors by 17 (28.3%) nursing students were allocated in the negative category. The categories of metaphors obtained as a result of the content analysis are visually presented in Figure 1.

Discussion

This study tries to explain how senior nursing students conceptualized old age through metaphors. Due to the nursing profession, it is important to determine the perspectives of senior students,

Table 2. Metaphors developed by participants.

Metaphor Code (MC)	Metaphors	n	%	Examples of statements regarding the reasons for the metaphors produced by the participants
MC-1	Child	5	8.3	'They need attention.' (F, A21) 'He needs care, attention and love.' (M, A22) 'They expect special attention, they are afraid of being alone. Feeling loved makes them happy.' (F, A22)
MC-2	Old car	1	1.6	'It malfunctions a lot.' (M, A23)
MC-3	Fruit	3	5.0	'It may be rotten inside. He lived his life to the fullest.' (M, A25) 'First it matures, becomes beautiful, then enters the stage of decay.' (M, A22) 'It can rot. There is no turning back; it is clear that it is coming to an end gradually. The process can only be slowed down.' (F, A24)
MC-4	Winter	1	1.6	'Sunny days have decreased.' (F, A23)
MC-5	Flower	6	10.0	'If you take care of it with love, its life will be so beautiful and precious. He also withers when not looked after like a flower.' (F, A24) 'Even if it dries up and fades, it always remains beautiful and valuable.' (F, A21)
MC-6	Finish line	1	1.6	'It expresses the end of life.' (F, A21)
MC-7	Baby	2	3.3	'Spiritually and mentally similar to him.' (F, A22) 'Your dependence on others increases.' (F, A22)
MC-8	Tree	21	35.0	'It provides rest in its shadow.' (F, A28) 'It is strong; it protects.' (F, A22) 'He guides us with his experience.' (F, A22) 'Although it cannot bear fruit in time, it is an oxygen source.' (F, A23) 'He guides us with his knowledge.' (F, A24) 'He has had many things in life. Sometimes it is exposed to very strong winds. Sometimes it embraces events that are beautiful enough to host a sparrow.' (F, A21) 'Despite the storms he has seen for years, he can stay upright.' (M, A23)
MC-9	Book	5	8.3	'As we read (as we get older), we gain experience.' (F, A21), (F, A21) 'Experiences host many events.' (F, A23) 'Equipped with a lot of knowledge and experience' (M, A22), (F, A22)
MC-10	World	1	1.6	'Like the world, people accumulate a lot of things as they get older.' (F, A21)
MC-11	Wine	1	1.6	'It gets better with age.' (F, A21)
MC-12	Bus at the last stop	1	1.6	'It is felt that the end of the road has been reached by experiencing all the events that can be experienced in life.' (M, A23)
MC-13	Broken TV	1	1.6	'They want to show us colorful things, but they do not have the energy.' (F, A21)
MC-14	Pearl in oyster	1	1.6	'As time passes, its value is realized. It directs the society with its radiance.' (F, A22)
MC-15	End of a movie	1	1.6	'Neither your body nor your mind is like at the beginning of the movie. You are calmer.' (F, A22)
MC-16	Wolf	1	1.6	'As long as it survives, it holds a lot of experience – experience and knowledge.' (M, A23)
MC-17	Stairs	1	1.6	'Our lives are like those stairs that we sometimes go up and sometimes down. Each step actually refers to our periods in life. The last step of the ladder is actually the last step of life.' (F, A22)
MC-18	House	1	1.6	'This is where we will go at the end of the day.' (F, A23)
MC-19	End of a long road	1	1.6	'Life is like a long road. By crossing certain paths, we come to the end, and death greets us.' (F, A22)
MC-20	Banana	1	1.6	'It gets sweeter as it matures.' (F, A22)
MC-21	Nature	1	1.6	'You get tired as you travel, but your vision expands.' (F, A23)
MC-22	Climbing a mountain	1	1.6	'You get higher as you get older. You gain more experience in life. The more tired you are, the older you get. When you climb to the top, you complete this adventure and end your life.' (M, A22)
MC-23	Grass	1	1.6	'You become unable to meet your own needs and need the help of others.' (M, A25)
MC-24	Sunset	1	1.6	'You are like a sunrise when you are young. You are so hardworking and happy, but in old age you cannot do the things you want and be happy because death is very close to you.' (F, A22)

who will be in frequent contact with healthy or sick older people individuals. Metaphor is a way for individuals to report their positive and negative feelings about a concept with their own expressions and to indicate their perceptions about that concept (Charteris-Black, 2012; Güneş & Firat, 2016). Analyzing students' perceptions of any concept that is determined and wanted to be researched is important in terms of determining what needs to be improved in nursing education (Cinar, 2022).

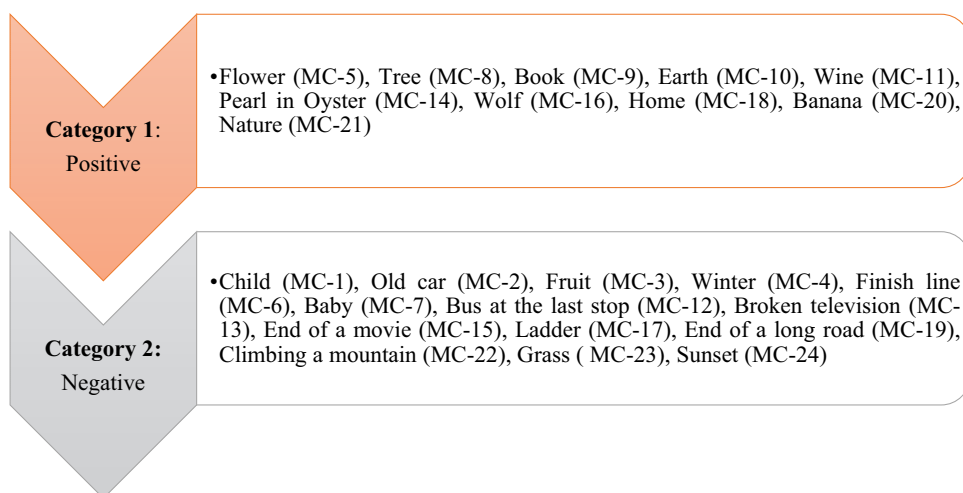


Figure 1. Categories developed about the concept of aging.

Studies have been conducted on nursing students' perspectives toward the older people, yielding different results (Dahlke et al., 2020; Demir et al., 2016; Ghimire et al., 2019; López-Hernández et al., 2021; Özdil et al., 2021). Similarly, in our study, it is seen that students express old age with positive and negative metaphors. Demir et al. (2016) reported that students have a positive attitude toward aging in their study with nursing students. Likewise, in a different study, it was found that the perceptions of nursing students toward older people individuals were positive, but their perspectives and some behaviors toward providing care to older people individuals were negative (Sinan et al., 2021). In our study, the positive metaphors of the students about old age are: flower, tree, book, earth, wine, pearl in oyster, wolf, house, banana, and nature. In a study in which the views of senior nursing students on the problems of the older people and their attitudes toward ageism were evaluated during the COVID-19 pandemic, the main themes were determined as sensitivity, emotional shock, culture, and iceberg (Özdil et al., 2021). The studies carried out and the results obtained from our study suggest that the older people are perceived as a source of experience and knowledge, and this makes the older people to be seen as valuable as a tree or pearl. Due to the cultural structure of the Turkish society, people spend more time with their family or the older people in their immediate surroundings, and they consider the care of the older people as a responsibility of the family. It is thought that this situation may have contributed to the development of positive attitudes of the students. In fact, since the students participating in the research are members of the society, their thoughts reflect the perception and the older people in the environment where they grew up (Demir et al., 2016; Kulakçı, 2010).

The negative metaphors about old age in our study were: child, old car, fruit, winter, finish line, baby, bus at the last stop, broken television, end of a movie, stairs, end of a long road, climbing a mountain, grass, and sunset. All these metaphors bring to mind the expression of silver tsunami, a metaphor of old age that has been heard frequently recently. With this metaphor, old age is expressed as a situation that is feared, that causes physical and mental decline, brings biological, social, and cultural aging, and that creates panic for young people (Chivers, 2021). In a study in which the metaphors created by nursing students related to aging were examined, it was determined that the metaphors formed by the students were mostly negative. In the same study, students' metaphors about aging were examined and grouped under four main themes and 11 sub-themes. The main themes were stated as aging as an ending story, the need for care, attention and support, and aging as a new beginning and a source of life. The sub-themes were: acceptance, no turning back, nearing the end,

deprivation, helplessness, dependence, rooting, starting, guiding, being a building block, and seeing value (Yilmaz & Yuksel, 2021). The fact that the changes seen with aging increase the need for care with some older people and they become dependent suggests that older people may be perceived negatively.

In particular, the transformation in the family structure depending on the process of industrialization, urbanization, and social change has caused the status of the older people to alter both in society and in the family. The fact that older people are seen as a burden to society due to increasing health problems is also reflected in the services and care provided to them, therefore, caring for older people is seen as an undesirable field of work. Negative prejudices, values, beliefs and attitudes toward older people will be reflected in the quality of care given to them (Ayaz Alkaya & Birimoğlu Okuyan, 2017; Kulakçı, 2010; Neville & Dickie, 2014). For this reason, it is extremely important to draw attention to aging process and the older people and to raise awareness on this issue. Students who have insufficient knowledge about the aging process can reflect the culture of the society and the approach to the older people in their behaviors. In a study conducted with nursing students, it was determined that students' previous experiences with older people, clinical nurse and clinical instructors within these experiences, and factors such as the cognitive status of the older people affect students' perspectives toward them (Dahlke et al., 2020). It is stated in the literature that educational programs prepared for students are effective in increasing positive attitudes toward the older people (Akpınar Söylemez et al., 2018; Ross et al., 2015). In the study of Akpınar Söylemez et al., it was stated that geriatric nursing course changed the attitude toward the older people positively, and was especially effective in reducing the negative attitudes of students (Akpınar Söylemez et al., 2018).

There are many factors that affect the perception and attitudes of nursing students toward the older people. It should not be forgotten that negative perceptions and attitudes will also reflect on caring behaviors. For this reason, both theoretical and practical plans should be made in a way to evaluate and positively change the perception and attitudes of nursing students toward the older people (Dahlke et al., 2020; López-Hernández et al., 2021; Sinan et al., 2021).

Limitations

This study has some limitations. First, this study was conducted only with fourth year nursing students. Secondly, structured interviews were used due to the nature of metaphor studies. This affected the flexibility of the process and led to uniform data collection. At the same time, the lack of in-depth interviews is also one of the limitations.

Conclusions

In our study, it was found that students generally reported their perceptions of aging with positive metaphors. These metaphors show that the knowledge and experiences of the older people increase their value. In order to increase and maintain a positive attitude toward the older people, it is necessary to include more topics and practices related to aging and older people care in the undergraduate education, to create practice areas where students can give more care to the older people and spend more time with them, and to ensure their participation in activities that will increase awareness of older people care. It is recommended to organize programs on geriatric nursing after graduation. There are descriptive studies examining the place perception and attitudes of nursing students toward the older people in the literature, but different and qualitative studies should be planned to improve these perceptions and attitudes.

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Ethics committee approval

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. To conduct this study, an approval was obtained from the Gazi University Ethics Committee (date: 11.01.2022, issue number: 2022-008) was obtained. In addition, institutional permission was obtained from Bilecik University for the implementation of the research. Written informed consent was obtained from the participants who agreed to participate in the study.

Data availability statement

The datasets used during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request

Authorship statement

The authors are responsible for all aspects of the work and all listed authors meet the authorship criteria.

(KK) designed the study. (BBK) collected the data. (KK, ESÖ) analyzed the data. (KK, ESÖ, BBK) prepared the manuscript. All authors approved the final version for submission.

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